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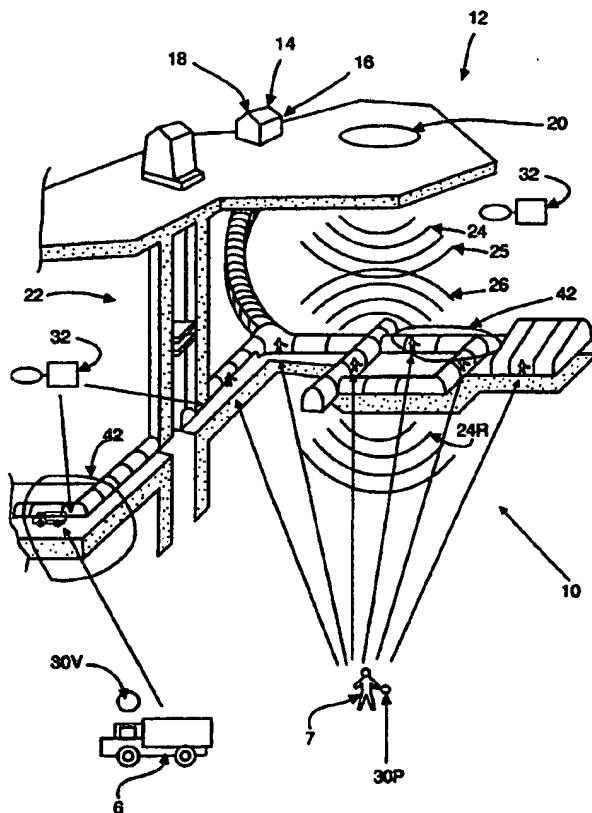
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(54) Title: SYNCHRONIZED UNDERGROUND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A synchronized communication system for communicating signals into and from a medium is disclosed. The communication system utilizes a transmitter located at a central station external to the medium, which transmits a low frequency synchronization signal into the medium. Transceivers located within the medium receive the low frequency synchronization signal and send information radio signals synchronized with the low frequency synchronization signal to a receiver located at the central station. Zone transceivers are located within the medium to receive and retransmit the synchronization signal at the low frequency within a zone. The zone transceivers also receive information signals from transceivers in the zone and transmit zone information radio signals to the central station containing information corresponding to the information received from the transceivers in the zone. The communication system also comprises repeater stations which act to retransmit both synchronization signals and information signals thereby increasing the propagation of the synchronous signals within the medium.

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SYNCHRONIZED UNDERGROUND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to radio frequency communication systems for communication of signals into a media. More specifically, the present 10 invention relates to a synchronized communication system for communication of radio signals into an underground environment.

15 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Electromagnetic waves with a radio frequency have been used in the past to transmit information between remote locations. Such electromagnetic 20 waves, often referred to as radio waves or radio signals, propagate well through the air, but in general do not propagate well through man-made structures, such as large buildings, or into the body of the earth.

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However, it has been known in the past that radio signals having a lower frequency, generally below 300 KHz, propagate better through a medium such as the body of the earth or large man-made 30 structures, than radio signals having higher frequencies. In fact, low frequency radio signals have been known to propagate several thousand feet, or two to three kilometers, into the earth. In

addition, low frequency radio signals have been used to carry information to remote locations either under the ground or in large man-made structures. However, in order to generate low frequency radio signals that can propagate through the earth, it is generally necessary to have a fairly large antenna, such as an antenna approximately 10 meters to 150 meters in diameter, as well as a signal generator that can generate a signal at a sufficient power output to reach the surface. While it is possible to have an antenna of this size located on the surface of the earth, it is generally difficult to have antennas of this size and power output located underneath the earth or within man-made structures. Also, it would not be possible for such an antenna to be made portable so that it can be carried by an individual. This results in it being possible to transmit low frequency radio signals into underground environments or into large man-made structures, but it is difficult to then transmit low frequency radio signals out of underground environments or man-made structures simply because it is not practical to have antennas and signal generators with such large diameters and power outputs in these environments, or, to have them mobile.

Accordingly, in the past, several types of communication systems utilizing low frequency radio signals have been proposed. However, all of these prior art systems provide for communication into the

medium, but do not provide for easy communication of radio signals out of the medium. In particular, low frequency communication signals for communication to underground environments, such as in mines, have 5 been proposed in the past. However, these low frequency communication systems generally are used to propagate alert signals or warnings into the underground environment, but do not provide easy transmission of information out of the underground 10 environment.

Accordingly, there is a need in the art for a communication system for communicating radio signals to, as well as from, remote transceivers located 15 within a medium through which radio signals generally do not propagate well. In particular, there is a need in the art for a radio frequency communication system for communicating radio signals to and from remotely located transceivers utilizing 20 a low frequency radio signal, but not requiring large antennas or powerful signal generators located within the medium.

25 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is an object of this invention to at least partially overcome the disadvantages of the prior art. Also, it is an object of this 30 invention to provide an improved type of communication system which can use low frequency

radio signals to transmit information to and from remote transceivers located within the medium.

Accordingly, in one of its objects, this 5 invention resides in a radio frequency communication system for communicating radio signals, said communication system comprising:

10 a central station comprising a transmitter for transmitting a synchronization signal at a low radio frequency into a medium, and, a receiver for receiving radio signals from the medium;

15 a remote transceiver located within the medium for receiving the low frequency synchronization signal and transmitting an information radio signal to be received by the central station; and wherein the information radio signal is synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal.

20 In a further aspect, the present invention resides in a radio frequency communication system for communicating information from and to remote transceivers located within a medium by way of radio signals, said communication system comprising:

25 a central station comprising a transmitter for transmitting a low frequency radio signal into the medium, and, a receiver for receiving information signals from the medium;

30 a zone transceiver located within a zone of the medium for receiving the low frequency radio signal and transmitting a zone information radio signal in

response to and synchronized in time with the low frequency radio signal; and

wherein the zone information radio signal is indicative of information received by the zone

5 transceiver from remote transceivers located within the zone.

In a still further aspect, the present invention resides in a method of communicating 10 information to and from remote transceivers located within a medium by way of radio signals, said method comprising the steps of:

transmitting a low frequency radio signal into the medium from a central station;

15 receiving the low frequency radio signal at a zone transceiver located within a zone of the medium;

transmitting a zone information radio signal from the zone transceiver to the central station in 20 response to, and synchronized in time with, the low frequency radio signal; and

wherein the zone information signal is indicative of information received by the zone transceiver from transceivers located within the 25 zone.

One advantage of the present invention is that by having the signals emanating from transceivers within the medium synchronized with the low 30 frequency radio signal being transmitted into the medium, the specific time at which the information

signals from within the medium should be received by the central station can be determined. In other words, the receiver at the central station can be designed to receive the signal at specific time periods, thereby improving the reception of the information radio signals emanating from transceivers within the medium. This permits the central station to receive radio signals having a much lower power output and also at a higher frequency. Radio signals of this type can be easily generated by mobile transceivers having relatively small antennas.

A further advantage of the present invention is that the synchronization of the information radio signals emanating from transceivers within the medium can be used to assist in filtering noise from the information radio signals. In other words, because it is known that the information signals from transceivers in the medium should be received at precise time periods, more advanced filters, such as filters which perform Laplace transformations, Fourier transformations, or a combination of both, can be utilized to minimize the noise to signal ratio of the information signals being transmitted from transceivers within the medium.

A further advantage of the present invention is that, because the system improves the reception of signals being transmitted from transceivers within the medium, the transceivers can be used to transmit

information of a more sensitive nature, such as information regarding the control and monitoring of equipment within the medium.

5 A further advantage of the present invention is that zone transceivers can be used within the medium to amplify and retransmit signals received from transceivers within the zone of the zone transceivers. In this way, zone transceivers can
10 extend the electromagnetic signal coverage of the low frequency transmitter and receiver located outside of the medium. The zone information signals transmitted by the zone transceivers will be synchronized in time with the low frequency radio
15 signal, and therefore will also be received more easily by the receiver at the central station. In addition, where more than one zone transceiver is used, each zone transceiver can be synchronized with the low frequency radio signal.

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 A still further advantage of the present invention is that the low frequency synchronization radio signal can be modulated. In this way, information can be transmitted from the central
25 station to the transceivers. Also, the central station can modulate the synchronization signal to poll or address a specific transceiver or send information, such as instructions, to a specific transceiver. In one embodiment, a part of the
30 modulated synchronization signal can be reserved for receiving information radio signals from any one of

the transceivers indicating an emergency or alert within the mine.

A further advantage of the present invention is
5 that all radio signal communication within the medium can be synchronized by the low frequency radio signal. In this way, communication between transceivers within the medium can be improved, even though the communication signals are not transmitted
10 outside of the medium, simply because the information signals being transmitted between the various transceivers within the medium is synchronized, and therefore improved filtering and reception are possible.

15

Further aspects of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and drawings which illustrate the invention and preferred embodiments of the
20 invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings, which illustrate embodiments
25 of the invention:

Figure 1 is a schematic side elevation showing a mine site with the synchronized communication system according to one embodiment of the present
30 invention installed therein;

Figure 2 is a schematic drawing of a further embodiment of the synchronized communication system according to one embodiment of the present invention;

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Figure 3 is a schematic drawing of the central station of the communication system according to a further embodiment of the present invention;

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Figure 4 is a timing drawing showing the low frequency synchronized signal synchronizing communication into and out of a medium; and

15

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of a zone transceiver according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

As shown in Figure 1, the present invention
5 comprises a communication system, shown generally by
reference numeral 10, for communicating radio
signals into a medium 22. The communication system
10 illustrated in Figure 1 is installed in a mine 8
and therefore the medium 22 comprises the body of
10 the earth.

The communication system 10 comprises a central
station, shown generally by reference numeral 12.
The central station 12 is generally located outside
15 of the medium 22. The central station 12 in the
embodiment shown in Figure 1 comprises a
transmitter/receiver shack 18 electrically coupled
to an antenna 20.

20 The antenna 20 is generally a large surface
loop antenna which can generate low frequency waves.
For example, the surface loop antenna can be between
about 10 meters to 150 meters in diameter.

25 The transmitter/receiver shack 18 houses a
transmitter 14 and a receiver 16. The transmitter
14 transmits a synchronized signal, shown generally
by reference numeral 24, through the antenna 20 at a
low frequency into the medium 22. The receiver 16
30 receives radio signals from the medium 22 through
the antenna 20. Accordingly, the antenna 20 can be

used to both transmit the synchronized signal at a low frequency and receive radio signals from the medium 22.

5 The communication system 10 further comprises at least one, and preferably a plurality, of remote transceivers 30. The remote transceivers 30 are located within the medium 22 and can receive the low frequency synchronization signal 24. The remote
10 transceivers can also transmit an information radio signal, shown generally by reference numeral 26, to be received by the antenna 20 of the central station 12.

15 As shown at least in Figures 1 and 2, the transceivers 30 can be several types of transceivers 30. For instance, the transceivers 30 can be personal transceivers 30P, which can be located on personnel. The personal transceivers 30P preferably
20 are connected to the capped lamps of the personnel and can derive power from the battery attached to the capped lamp. The personal transceivers 30P send information radio signals 26 comprising information regarding the person 7 associated with the personal
25 transceiver 30P. Such information may include the location of the person 7 in the mine 8 and how long the person 7 has been stationary.

30 The transceivers 30 also comprise vehicle transceivers 30V which are attached to vehicles 6. The vehicle transceivers 30V generally derive power

from the battery or alternator of the vehicle 6. Vehicle transceivers 30V send information radio signals 26 comprising information regarding the vehicle 6 associated with the vehicle transceiver 5 30V. Such information may include the location of the vehicle 6 within the mine 8, the type of vehicle 6 and the mechanical condition of the vehicle 6 such as its fuel state and engine temperature.

10 Several other types of remote transceivers are also possible, such as the remote alert transceivers 30A shown schematically in Figure 2 which can be located at different locations in the mine 8 to visually and audibly alert persons 7 in the mine 8 15 of an emergency. Figure 2 also schematically shows a control transceiver 30C which can control equipment, such as drills (not shown), in the mine 8. The control transceiver 30C sends information radio signals 26 indicative of the status of the 20 equipment to which the control transceiver 30C is connected, and, also receives control information from the central station 12 to control operation of the equipment to which the control transceiver 30C is connected.

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The low frequency synchronization signal 24 propagates through a portion of the medium 22 thereby creating a synchronous field, shown generally by reference numeral 25, within at least a 30 portion of the medium 22. All transceivers 30 located within the synchronous field 25 are able to

receive the synchronized signal 24 and can send the information radio signals 26 to the central station 12 synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal 24. In this way, the central 5 station 12 can more easily receive the information radio signals 26 from the transceivers 30 at least, in part, because the receiver 16 of the central station 12 polls for or expects to receive the information radio signals 26 at discreet 10 predetermined time periods corresponding to the period of the low frequency synchronization signal 24. Also, the central station 12 utilizes the synchronization of the information radio signal to know during which predetermined time periods the 15 information radio signals should be received and thereby can apply more advanced filtering to remove noise from the information radio signal.

It is found that low frequency radio waves in 20 the range of 2 KHz to 200 KHz propagate best through the body of the earth. Therefore, when the system 10 is used in a mine 8, as illustrated in Figure 1, the synchronization signal 24 is preferably transmitted as a low frequency radio wave having a 25 frequency between 2 KHz to 200 KHz and, more preferably, between 3 KHz to 10 KHz.

The information radio signals 26 transmitted by the transceivers 30 preferably are also in the low 30 frequency radio range. However, it is not practical to have antennas large enough to generate

information radio signals 26 from the transceivers 30 below 100 KHz. Accordingly, it is preferable that the information radio signals are transmitted at a frequency in the range of 100 KHz to 200 KHz 5 and, more preferably, in the range of 150 KHz to 200 KHz.

As also shown in Figure 1, the communication system 10 can comprise zone transceivers 32. Each 10 zone transceiver 32 is located within a specific zone 42 in the mine. These zone transceivers 32 receive the synchronized signal 24 and retransmit an amplified synchronization signal 24Z, as best seen in Figure 2, at the same low frequency for reception 15 by transceivers 30 in the zone 42. In this way, zone transceivers 32 can increase the propagation of the synchronized signal 24 and, therefore, the synchronous field 25, within the medium 25, by receiving and retransmitting an amplified 20 synchronized signal 24Z within the zone 42. Likewise, the zone transceivers 32 receive the information radio signals 26 from the transceivers within the zone 42. The zone transceivers 32 then retransmit an amplified zone information radio 25 signal 26Z to be received by the antenna 20 of the central station 12. The zone information radio signals 26Z is synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal 24 and carries information contained in the information radio 30 signal 26 of transceivers located within the zone 42 of the zone transceivers 32.

In a similar manner, the communication system 10 can comprise remote repeater stations 34. The remote repeater stations 34 are located within the 5 medium 22 and preferably near a boundary of the portion of the medium 22 through which the synchronized signal 24 can propagate. The remote repeater stations 34 receive the synchronization signal 24 and retransmit an amplified 10 synchronization signal 24R at the same low radio frequency for reception by transceivers 30 and zone transceivers 32 located proximate the remote repeater stations 34 but external to the portion of the medium 22 through which the synchronized signal 15 24 from the antenna 20 can normally propagate. The remote repeater stations 34 also receive information radio signals 26 and zone information radio signals 26Z and re-transmits amplified information radio signals 26R corresponding to these signals 26, 26Z 20 for reception by the central station 12. In this way, the remote repeater stations 34 can effectively extend the synchronous field 25 within the medium 22.

25 As shown in Figure 2, the amplified synchronized signal 24R from the remote repeater stations 34 can be received and retransmitted by a zone transmitter 32 located proximate the remote repeater stations 34. The retransmitted 30 synchronized signal 24Z from the zone transmitter 32 can then be received by a transceiver 30, such as a

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vehicle transceiver 30V, shown in Figure 2, within the zone 42 of the zone transceiver 32. The vehicle transceiver 30V then sends information signals 26 which are received by the zone transceiver 32 and 5 retransmitted as amplified zone information radio signals 26Z. The retransmitted zone information radio signals 26Z are received by the remote repeater stations 34 and retransmitted again as amplified information radio signals 26R which are in 10 turn received by antenna 20 of the central station 12.

As shown in Figure 2, the central station 12 can comprise a separate transmitter 14 and receiver 15 16 which receive signals from the central control station 13 and transmit the signals through the antenna 20 into the medium 22. In another embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Figure 3, the central station 12 can comprise 20 transceivers 15 which both receive and transmit the signals 24, 26 into and out of the medium 22. Accordingly, the present invention can operate whether the central station 12 comprises a single transceiver 15, more than one transceiver 15, or 25 separate transmitters 14 and receivers 16.

As also shown in Figure 3, the central station 12 comprises a central controller 50 which receives instructions from the central control station 13, or 30 other locations, either proximate or remote to central station 12, and converts these instructions

into digital signals DS. These digital signals DS are then sent to a transmitter 14, which in the embodiment shown in Figure 3, forms part of the base transceiver 15. The digital signals DS are then 5 sent from the transceiver 15 to the combiner 52. The combiner 52 comprises a processor 54 and amplifiers 560 and 56I. Amplifier 560 amplifies the information signals coming out of the medium 22 and the amplifier 56I amplifies the signals being 10 transmitted into the medium 22. The amplifiers 560 and 56I are connected to the antenna 20 to generate the radio wave signals which propagate into the medium 22.

15 Preferably, the central station 12 comprises a filter 58 which filters the information radio signals 26 received by the antenna 20 from the transceivers 30. The filter 58 can be any known type of filter to filter noise from the information 20 radio signals 26. However, as the information radio signals 26 are synchronized to the synchronized signal 24, it is possible to perform advanced filtering utilizing Laplace transformations and Fourier transformations. Therefore, the filter 58 25 can utilize Laplace and/or Fourier transformations to filter noise from the signals 26 because the radio information radio signals 26 are synchronized with the synchronization signal 24, and therefore the central station 12 knows when the signals 26 30 will be transmitted and therefore when they should be received by the antenna 20.

Figure 4 is a timing diagram illustrating how the information radio signals 26 are synchronized with the synchronization signal 24. As shown in 5 Figure 4, the synchronization signal 24 corresponds to a sync pulse 80 which is created by demodulating the synchronization signal 24.

The zone transceiver 32 in the embodiment 10 illustrated in Figure 4 is operating at 160 KHz and the information carried by the zone information signal 26Z is represented by the zone transceiver response 82. The dark squares illustrated in the zone transceiver response 82 of Figure 4 actually 15 correspond to a number of pulses which the zone transceiver 32 is transmitting. The number of pulses will be a function of the frequency of the synchronization signal 24 and the frequency at which the zone transceiver transmits the information radio 20 signals 26. In this embodiment, where the zone transceivers 32 transmit the information radio signals 26 at about 160 KHz, there will be about 18 pulses or cycles within each sync pulse 80.

25 The presence of the 160 KHz beacon, which corresponds to the dark squares, during the sync pulse indicates a high or binary "1" (indicated by the presence of a square box) signal and the absence of a 160 KHz beacon (indicated by the absence of a 30 square box) indicates a low or binary "0" value. Figure 4 illustrates that the zone information

signal 26Z, as represented by the zone transceiver response 82, is synchronized with the sync pulse 80 generated by the synchronization signal 24 because each of the square boxes correspond in time with the 5 sync pulse 80.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the zone transceiver response will commence with a leader portion and then have a status information portion.

10 After the status information portion, the zone transceiver 32 will then transmit additional information digitally by the presence or absence of the 160 KHz beacon at each upward step of the sync pulse 80. In this way, the information radio 15 signals 26 embody digital information by the presence or absence of the 160 KHz beacon at each upward step or high value of the sync pulse 80.

In another preferred embodiment, the 20 synchronizing signal 24 can be modulated in order to transmit information down into the medium 22. Because of the low frequency of the synchronization signal 24, any information transmitted into the medium 22 will, of course, have a small band width. 25 Nevertheless, information can be reliably transmitted into the medium 22.

Figure 4 illustrates one preferred embodiment where the synchronization signal 24 is modulated 30 using Frequency Shift Keying (FSK) to transmit information into the medium 22. The synchronization

signal 24 is varied from a first low frequency to a second low frequency where the second low frequency is different from the first low frequency. For example, in a preferred embodiment, as illustrated 5 in Figure 4, the synchronization signal 24 is varied from a first low frequency 8192 Hz to a second frequency of 9000 Hz. The rate at which the synchronization signal 24 is varied indicates the information or instructions being sent.

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For example, in a preferred embodiment as illustrated in Figure 4, the synchronizations signal 24 can be modulated between 1 Hz to 49 Hz. This means that the frequency of the synchronization 15 signal 24 can be varied from 8192 Hz to 9000 Hz between 1 and 49 times a second. The zone transceivers 32 and the transceivers 30 will be able to detect the rate at which the synchronization signal 24 changes between these two frequencies and 20 in this way information, including instructions, can be transmitted from the central station 12 to the transceivers 30 and zone transceivers 32.

Preferably, the modulation frequency of the 25 synchronization signal 24, which are indicative of the information and instructions being sent to the mine 8, will be selected to avoid harmonics. For example, the modulation frequencies can be strategically selected with 1 Hz to 2.25 Hz steps to 30 avoid harmonics between each other.

Preferably, the zone transceiver response 82 will be sent in response to an instruction from the central station 12 addressing a particular zone transceiver 32. For example, the central station 12 5 will modulate the synchronization signal 24 until to poll or address a particular zone transceiver 32. The addressed zone transceiver 32 would then send its zone information radio signal 26Z which would be in the form of the zone transceiver response 82.

10

If a zone transceiver 32 sends its transceiver response 82 after being polled or addressed by the central station 12, the central station 12 would know the addressed zone transceiver 32 is sending 15 the its zone information radio signal 26Z and thereby could identify the source of the information. In the alternative, if a zone transceiver 32 is independently sending a signal to the central station 12, it can uniquely identify 20 itself using a unique information radio signal 26 comprising a binary code sent as described above.

Figure 5 shows a schematic diagram of a zone transceiver 32 according to one embodiment of 25 the present invention. As shown in Figure 5, the zone transceiver 32 will comprise an antenna 64 receiving radio information signals 26 from transceivers 30 as well as the synchronization signal 24 either from the central station 12 or a 30 repeater station 34. The antenna 60 is connected through an amplifier 62 to a transceiver 64.

Preferably, the transceiver 64 comprises a demodulator 66 which demodulates the modulated synchronization signal 24. The information demodulated from the modulated synchronization 5 signal 24 is sent to a processor 68. The processor 68 will then decode the information received through the modulated synchronization signal 24. The processor 68 is connected to memory 70 which has stored therein the codes to decode the modulated 10 synchronization signal 24. The memory 70 also has stored therein subroutines for the processor 68 to execute in response to the instructions from the central station 12. In this way, FSK modulation of the synchronizing signal 24 can transmit 15 information, and in particular instructions, to each of the zone transceivers 24.

While Figure 4 is illustrated with respect to a response from a zone transceiver 32, it is 20 understood that the central station 12 can poll or address a transceiver 30 in the same manner, provided the transceiver 30 has the necessary electronics, as illustrated in Figure 5 with respect to the zone transceiver 32, to demodulate the FSK 25 modulated synchronization signal 24. Accordingly, the central station 12 can send information, including instructions, to the transceivers 30 in a similar manner to that described above with respect to the zone transceivers 32.

In a further preferred embodiment, the zone transceivers 32 will continually receive information radio signals 26 from transceivers 30 located within their zone 42 and will store the information carried 5 in the information radio signals 26 in the memory 70. Such information could include the presence, as well as entry and exit, of personal transceivers 30P or vehicle transceivers 30V within the zone 42. The information stored in memory 70 will then be 10 downloaded once the zone transceiver 32 is polled or addressed by the central station 12 in the manner as discussed above. In this way, information regarding the zone 42 can be more quickly transmitted from the zone transceiver 32 to the central station 12 rather 15 than by having the central station 12 individually address or poll each of the transceivers 30 within the zone 42 by sending the modulated synchronization signal 24 through the zone transceiver 32 to each transceiver 30 in the zone 42.

20

The timing drawing illustrated in Figure 4 shows the synchronization signal 24 at the moment at which it changes from the first low frequency, namely 8192 Hz in this embodiment, to the second low 25 frequency, namely 9000 Hz in this embodiment.. In a further preferred embodiment of the present invention, one of the frequencies, namely, the first frequency or the second frequency, is selected as a priority listen frequency to receive alert signals 30 and the other frequency is used for receiving general information radio signals 26.

For example, as illustrated in Figure 4, when the synchronization signal 24 is at the first frequency, namely 8192 Hz, the central station 12 receives the information radio signals 26 in the form of the zone transceiver response 82 from the addressed zone transceiver 32. Once the modulated synchronization signal 24 shifts to the second frequency, namely 9000 Hz, the zone transceiver 10 response 82 from the addressed zone transceiver 32 stops and the central station listens for any priority signals, such as alert signals or other signals indicating an emergency in the mine 8. For example, as illustrated in Figure 4, the leader and 15 priority codes from a particular zone transceiver 32 or transceiver 30 are being received during the priority listen when the synchronization signal 24 is at the second frequency, namely 9000 Hz. This will indicate to the central station 12 that an 20 emergency exists within the mine 8 and the central station 12 will then send a general alert signal to all the zone transceivers 32 and transceiver 30 by FSK modulating the synchronizing signal. It is generally not necessary for the central station 12 25 to know which zone transceiver 32 or transceiver 30 is sending the alert signal and, therefore, it is not necessary that the leader and priority codes identify the zone transceiver 32 or transceiver 30. However, the system 10 can be configured such that 30 the zone transceiver 32 and transceiver 30 uniquely identify themselves by sending their unique code

when the transmit an information radio signal 26,
262 indicating an emergency in the mine 8.

It is understood that, while the present
5 invention has been described in terms of a
communication system for use in a mine 8, where the
medium 22 is a portion of the earth, the present
invention is not limited to communication systems
for communicating signals in the mine 8 or to a
10 medium 22 which is a portion of the earth. Rather,
the present invention can be used to communicate
signals to a number of different mediums 22, such as
buildings, subways, tunnels or other natural or man-
made structures. It is understood that while low
15 frequency radio signals will propagate best through
these large natural and man-made structures, the
specific frequency used can be selected so that the
low frequency synchronization signal 24 propagates
best through the corresponding medium 22 can be
20 easily determined by experimentation.

It is understood that, while the invention has
been described in terms of transceivers 15 and 30
and transmitter 14 and receiver 16, the invention is
25 not limited to any particular combination of
transmitter, receiver or transceiver. Rather, it is
understood that reference to a transmitter includes
the transmitter portion of the transceiver and
reference to a receiver includes the receiver
30 portion of a transceiver. Also, reference to a
transceiver may include a separate receiver and

transmitter operating in combination. Accordingly, the present invention includes all combinations of receivers, transmitters and transceivers which together function to receive and send the radio 5 signals as described and illustrated herein and is not limited to a particular transmitter, receiver or transceiver arrangement.

It will be understood that, although various 10 features of the invention have been described with respect to one or another of the embodiments of the invention, the various features and embodiments of the invention may be combined or used in conjunction with other features and embodiments of the invention 15 as described and illustrated herein.

Although this disclosure has described and illustrated certain preferred embodiments of the invention, it is to be understood that the invention 20 is not restricted to these particular embodiments. Rather, the invention includes all embodiments which are functional, mechanical or electrical equivalents of the specific embodiments and features that have been described and illustrated herein.

Claims

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are 5 defined as follows:

1. A radio frequency communication system for communicating radio signals, said communication system comprising:

10 a central station comprising a transmitter for transmitting a synchronization signal at a low radio frequency into a medium, and, a receiver for receiving radio signals from the medium;

15 a remote transceiver located within the medium for receiving the low frequency synchronization signal and transmitting an information radio signal to be received by the central station; and

20 wherein the information radio signal is synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal.

2. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 1 wherein the central station further comprises a filter circuit for filtering 25 noise from the first information signal; and

wherein the filter circuit utilizes the synchronization of the information radio signal to filter the noise from the information radio signal.

30 3. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 2 wherein the filter circuit

comprises a transformation circuit to perform a transformation selected from the group comprising Laplace transformation and Fourier transformation; and

5 wherein the filter circuit utilizes the synchronization of the first radio signal to perform one or more transformations in the group of transformations.

10 4. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 1 further comprising a plurality of remote transceivers, each remote transceiver for receiving the low frequency synchronization signal and for transmitting a corresponding information

15 radio signal synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal;

 wherein the low frequency synchronization signal can be modulated to address one of the plurality of remote transceivers; and

20 wherein, in response to the modulated synchronization signal, the addressed one of the plurality of remote transceivers transmits its corresponding information signal acknowledging receipt of the modulated synchronization signal.

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5. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 4 wherein each of the plurality of remote transmitters is associated with equipment, a vehicle or an individual; and

30 wherein the corresponding information signal transmitted by the addressed one of the plurality of

remote transceivers in response to the modulated synchronization signal comprises information regarding the equipment, vehicle or individual associated with the remote transmitter.

5

6. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 5 wherein the synchronization signal can be modulated to comprise information; and wherein at least one of the plurality of remote 10 transceivers comprises a de-modulation circuit for demodulating the synchronization signal.

7. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 1 wherein the medium is not 15 receptive to transmission of radio waves.

8. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 1 wherein the central station is located above ground, the remotely located 20 transceivers are located below ground, and the medium is a portion of the earth.

9. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 8 wherein the low frequency 25 synchronizing signal is transmitted at a frequency in the range of 2 KHz to 200 KHz and the information radio signal is transmitted at a frequency in the range of 100 KHz to 200 KHz.

30 10. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 1 further comprising:

a zone transceiver located within a zone of the medium for receiving the synchronization signal and retransmitting an amplified synchronization signal at the low radio frequency for reception by
5 transceivers in the zone;

wherein the zone transceiver receives the information signal from remote transceivers located within the zone and retransmits an amplified zone information radio signal to be received by the
10 central station; and

wherein the amplified zone information radio signal is synchronized in time with the low frequency synchronization signal and carries information contained in the information radio
15 signal.

11. A radio frequency communication system for communicating information from and to remote transceivers located within a medium by way of radio
20 signals, said communication system comprising:

a central station comprising a transmitter for transmitting a low frequency radio signal into the medium, and, a receiver for receiving information signals from the medium;

25 a zone transceiver located within a zone of the medium for receiving the low frequency radio signal and transmitting a zone information radio signal in response to and synchronized in time with the low frequency radio signal; and

30 wherein the zone information radio signal is indicative of information received by the zone

transceiver from remote transceivers located within the zone.

12. A radio frequency communication system as
5 defined in claim 11 wherein the zone transceiver
comprises a storage device for storing the
information received from the remote transceivers
located within the zone; and

wherein the zone information signal is
10 indicative of the information which had been
received by the zone transceiver from remote
transceivers located within the zone and which was
stored in the storage device.

15 13. A radio frequency communication system as
defined in claim 11 wherein the central station
further comprises a filter circuit for filtering
noise from the zone information radio signal; and

wherein the filter circuit utilizes the
20 synchronization of the zone information radio signal
to filter the noise from the zone information radio
signal.

14. A radio frequency communication system as
25 defined in claim 13 wherein the filter circuit
comprises a transformation circuit to perform a
transformation selected from a group of
transformations comprising Laplace transformations
and Fourier transformations; and

30 wherein the filter circuit utilizes the
synchronization of the zone information signal to

perform one or more of the transformations in the group of transformations.

15. A radio frequency communication system as
5 defined in claim 11 further comprising a plurality
of zone transceivers, each zone transceiver located
within a corresponding zone;

wherein each zone transceiver receives the low
frequency radio signal and transmits a corresponding
10 zone information radio signal synchronized in time
with the low frequency radio signal;

wherein, in response to the low frequency radio
signal, each one of the plurality of zone
transceivers transmits its corresponding zone
15 information radio signal synchronized in time with
the low frequency radio signal.

16. A radio frequency communication system as
defined in claim 11 wherein the low frequency radio
20 signal can be modulated to address each one of the
remote transceivers located within the medium;

wherein the zone transceiver receives the
modulated low frequency radio signal and retransmits
an amplified low frequency radio signal for
25 reception by transceivers in the zone; and

wherein, if the addressed transceiver is
located within the zone, the zone transceiver
receives an information radio signal transmitted
from the addressed transceiver and retransmits an
30 amplified information radio signal synchronized in

time with the low frequency radio signal to be received by the central station.

17. A method of communicating information to and
5 from remote transceivers located within a medium by way of radio signals, said method comprising the steps of:

transmitting a low frequency radio signal into the medium from a central station;

10 receiving the low frequency radio signal at a zone transceiver located within a zone of the medium;

15 transmitting a zone information radio signal from the zone transceiver to the central station in response to, and synchronized in time with, the low frequency radio signal; and

20 wherein the zone information signal is indicative of information received by the zone transceiver from transceivers located within the zone.

18. A method of communicating information as defined in claim 17 further comprising the step of:

25 filtering the noise from the zone information radio signal utilizing the synchronization of the zone information radio signal.

19. A method of communicating information as defined in claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

30 transmitting information signals from the remote transceivers in the zone to the zone

transmitter, said information signals containing information from the remote transceivers; and storing the information contained in the information signals in a storage device located at 5 the zone transceiver until the zone transceiver receives the low frequency radio signal.

20. A radio frequency communication system for communicating radio signals from and to remotely 10 located transceivers and remotely located zone transceivers located within a medium by way of radio signals, said communication system comprising: 15

a central station comprising a transmitter for transmitting a low frequency radio signal into the medium, and, a receiver for receiving information signals from the medium;

wherein the low frequency radio signal propagates the signal through a portion of the medium and creates a synchronous field within the 20 portion of the medium; and

wherein the transceivers and zone transceivers in the synchronous field transmit information radio signals and zone information radio signals, respectively, synchronized with the synchronous 25 field to the central station.

21. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 20 further comprising repeater stations located within the medium;

wherein the repeater station is located within the synchronous field and near a boundary of the portion of the medium;

5 wherein the repeater station receives the synchronization signal and retransmits an amplified synchronization signal at the low radio frequency for reception by the transceivers and zone transceivers located within the medium and proximate the repeater station to the portion of the medium;

10 wherein the repeater station receives information signals and zone information signals from transceivers and zone transceivers located within the medium and external to the portion of the medium and retransmits amplified information signals 15 and amplified zone information signals corresponding to the received information signals and received zone information signals; and

wherein the amplified information signals and zone information signals can be received by the 20 central station to thereby extend the synchronous field.

22. A radio frequency communication system as defined in claim 16 wherein the low frequency radio 25 signal can be modulated by Frequency Shift Keying (FSK) from a first low frequency to a second low frequency different from the first low frequency.

23. A radio frequency communication system as 30 defined in claim 22 wherein an information radio signal indicating an alert can be received by the

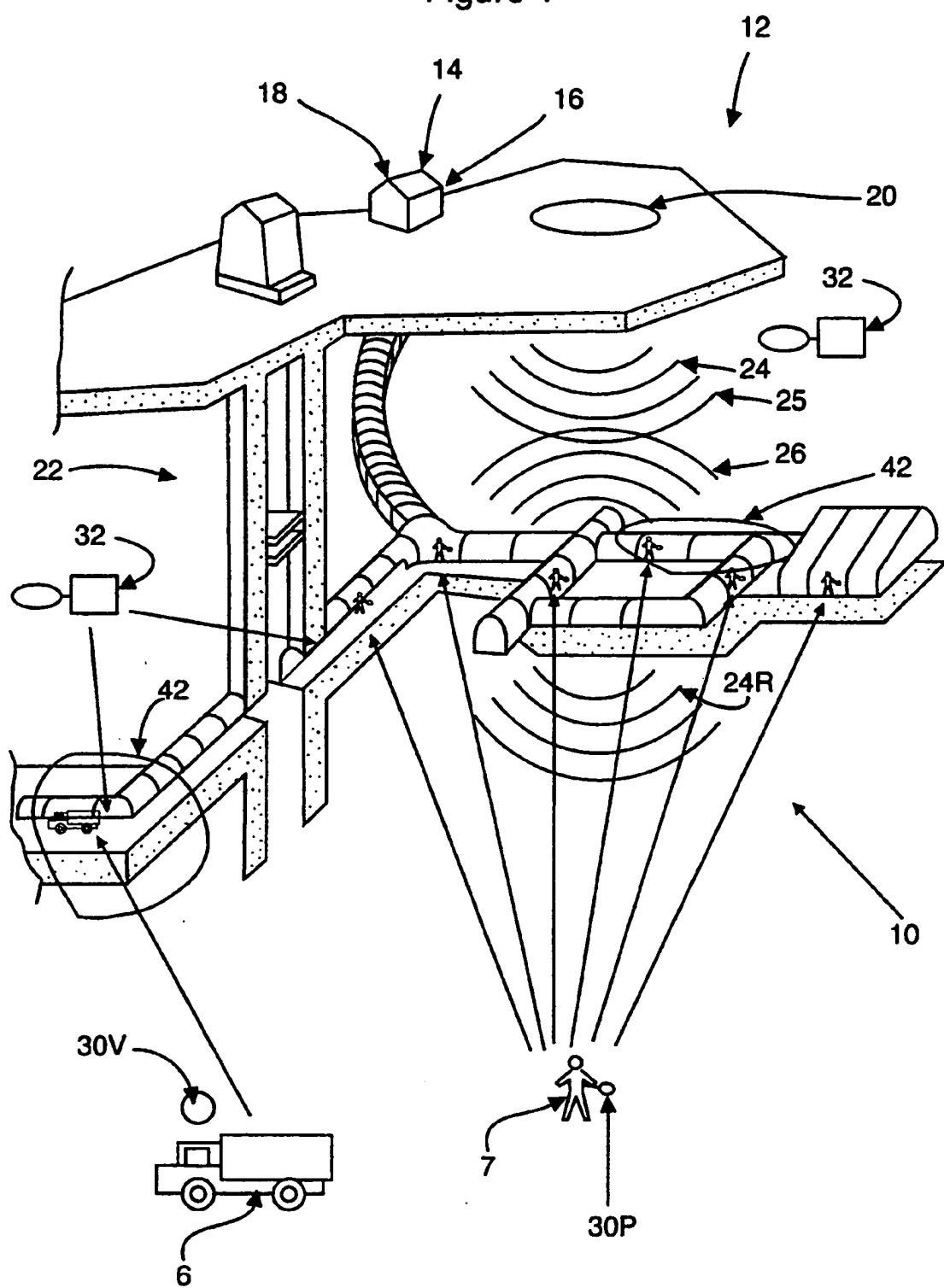
36

central station from any of the plurality of transceivers when the modulated synchronization signal is at the second low frequency; and

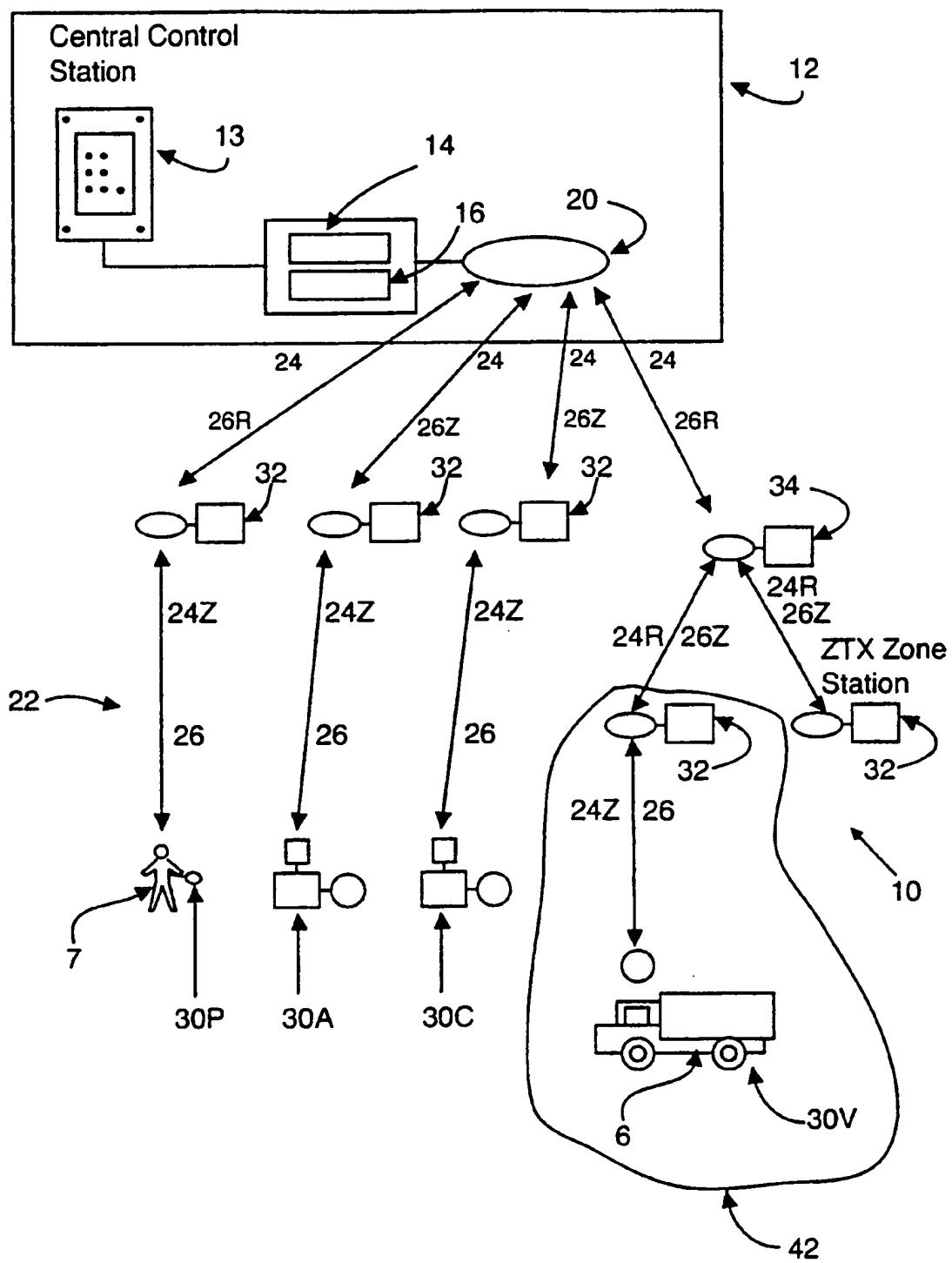
the second information radio signal indicating 5 an alert is synchronized with the second low frequency of the synchronization signal.

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Figure 1

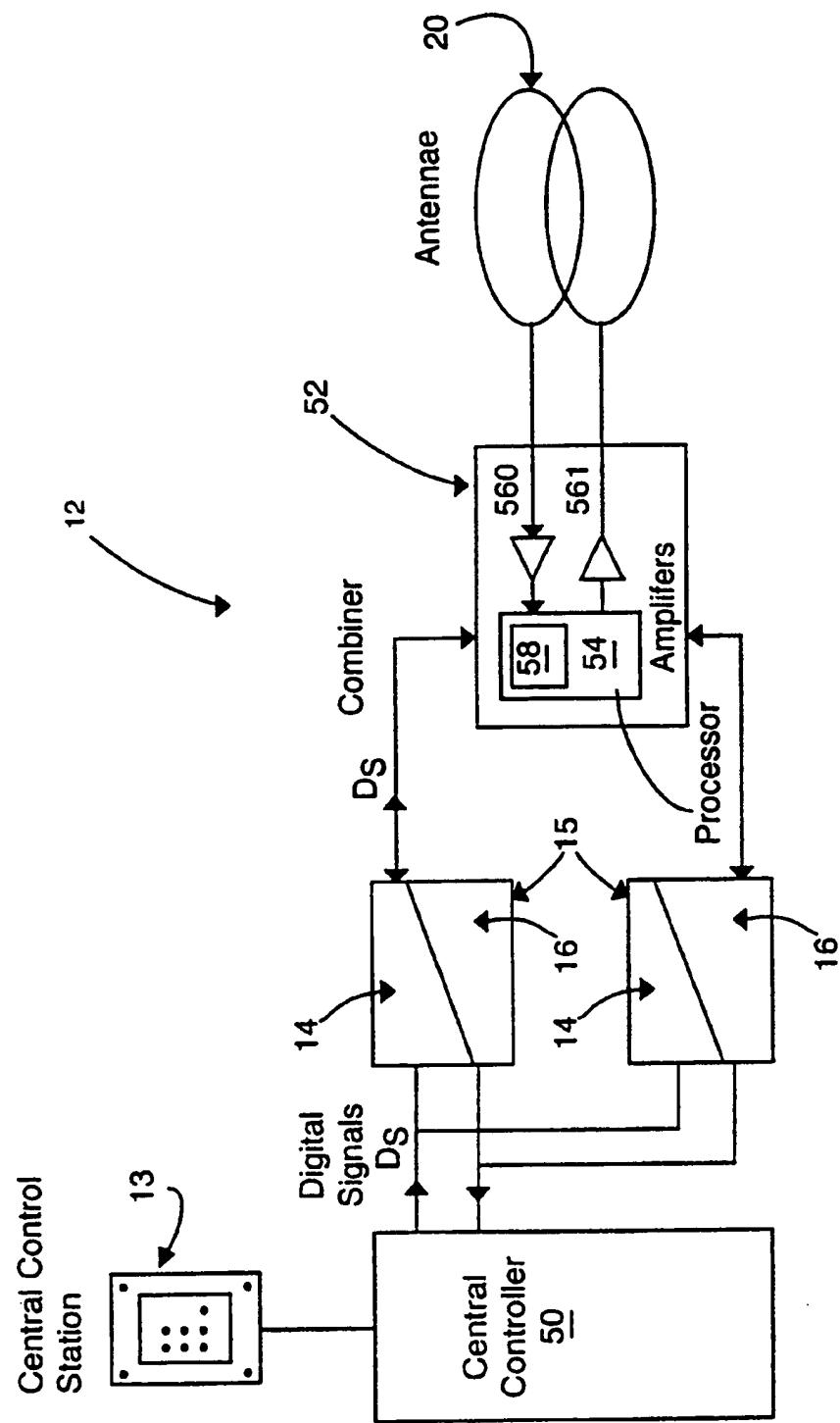


2/5 Figure 2



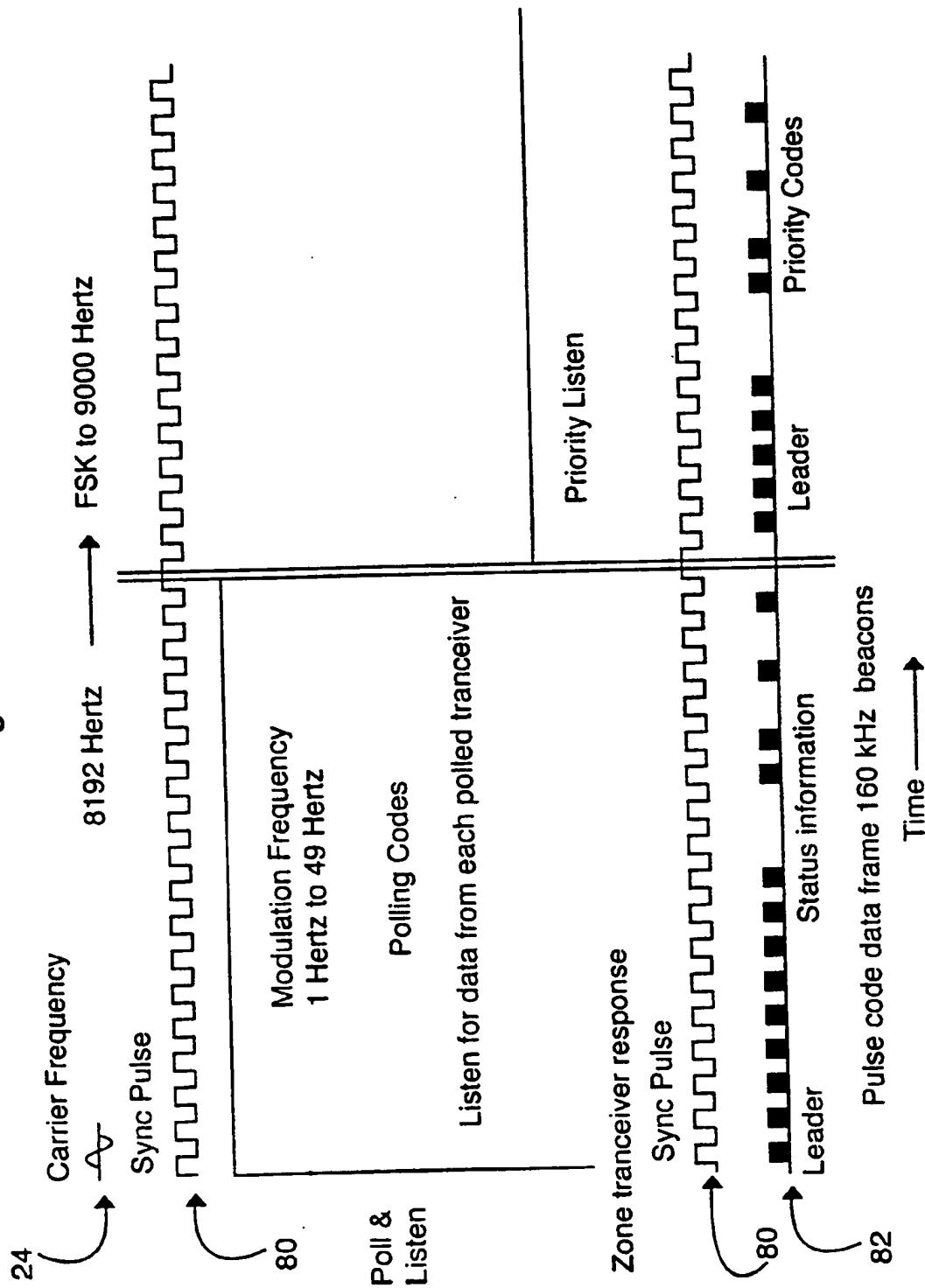
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Figure 3

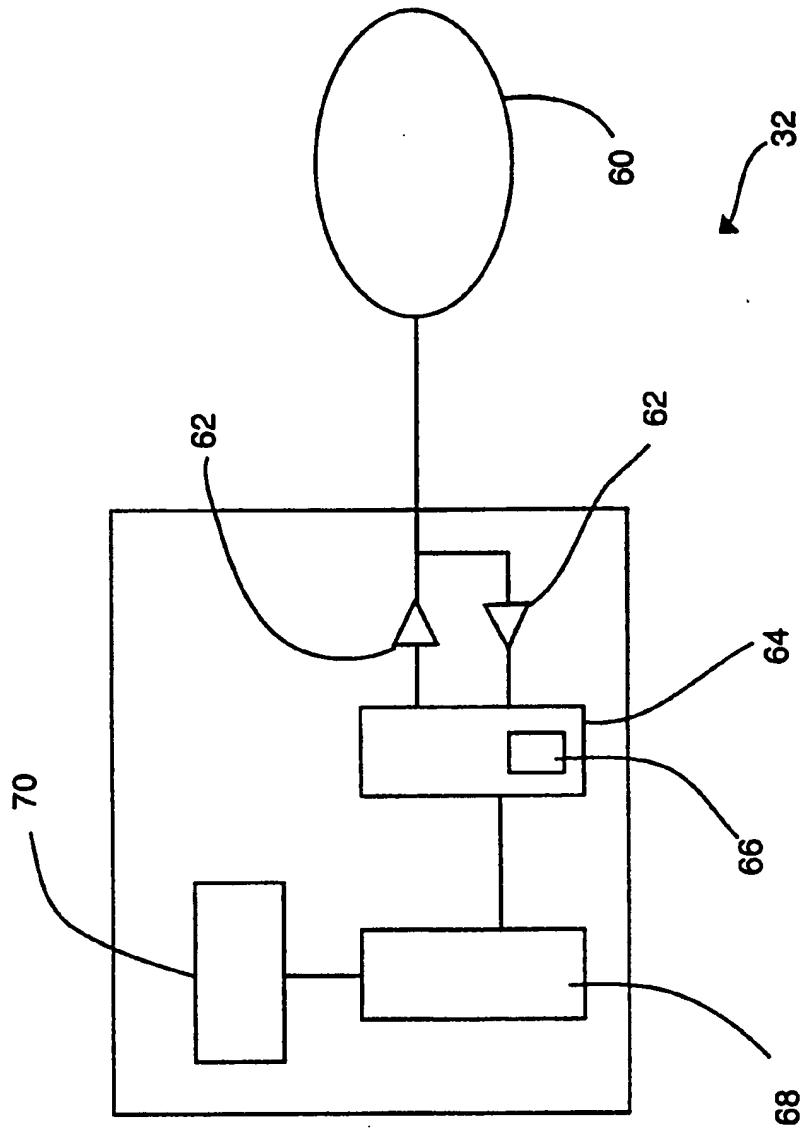


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Figure 4



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Figure 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Intern: at Application No
PCT/CA 00/00894

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 H04B13/02

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 H04B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

WPI Data, EPO-Internal, INSPEC

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category * | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|------------|---|-----------------------|
| A | US 4 090 135 A (FARSTAD ARNOLD J ET AL) 16 May 1978 (1978-05-16) the whole document ----- | 1-23 |
| A | US 2 499 195 A (JAMES A. MCNIVEN) 28 February 1950 (1950-02-28) the whole document ----- | 1-23 |
| A | US 4 414 661 A (KARLSTROM KRISTER) 8 November 1983 (1983-11-08) column 3, line 57 -column 4, line 60 ----- | 1-23 |

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

9 November 2000

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17/11/2000

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No
PCT/CA 00/00894

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